

*The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* by Roy Porter and Lesley Hall. New Haven: Yale U P, 1995. xii, 415 pp. ISBN 0-300-06221-4, \$35.00.

The dust jacket of *The Facts of Life* offers a stunning reproduction from Hunt's *The Hireling Shepherd* of the shepherd showing the death's head moth to the farm girl whose sultry gaze is turned from this emblem of instruction to the handsome young man. That an academic publisher would choose this image to attract readers to a work of scholarship testifies to the lasting erotic power of Hunt's work, as well as to the observation of the authors that for centuries readers have been drawn to works of sexual instruction to find erotic stimulation. A reader of this journal drawn to *The Facts of Life* by the dust jacket will find no mention of the Pre-Raphaelites, but, instead, intellectual stimulation in a sophisticated work on the history of sexuality that suggests some new approaches to Pre-Raphaelite studies.

As we all know in this post-Foucault era, sexuality is not innate, but constructed. "Sexual Knowledge" is not a record of discovery, but, as the title notes, a record of the "Creation" of discourses of sexuality. In *The Facts of Life* Porter and Hall have advanced the Foucauldian project by providing "the first scholarly survey of the rise of English-language treatises of sexual knowledge and guidance" (3), a survey that records the "permission and prohibition within which sexual knowledges were articulated, and the key debates that raged on such matters" (4). And in providing the textual details that Foucault notoriously eschews, Porter and Hall do modify the Foucauldian model in finding at any one historical moment since the Restoration not a unified discourse of knowledge/ power, but a "talking-shop of discourses and. . .ebb and flow of opinion" (9).

The organization of *The Facts of Life* into two sections, "From the Restoration to Victoria" and "The Victorians and Beyond," seems to offer the Victorian period as the turning point in the history of sexuality in the modern period, but Porter and Hall choose to provide only minimal detail about the Victorians. And yet the extensive description of sexual discourses in the Restoration and the Enlightenment illuminates our sense of the Victorians far more than the usual rehearsing of the details of Victorian sexual discourse, for their account finally refutes the received, although now fading, view that "the accession of Victoria per se wrought a radical transformation in public morals and attitudes" (12). The rich account of such popular anonymous works of medical folklore as *Aristotle's Master-Piece* demonstrates that the transmission of sexual knowledge through print was a constant in England from the Renaissance; the Victorian period differed only in that such works of sexual advice could be reproduced more efficiently with new technologies. Of equal interest is the use of pre-Victorian books of sexual advice to demonstrate that the problematizations of sexuality that Victorianists have cherished as particularly Victorian, notably the preoccupation with masturbation, prostitution, and the medicalization of sexual knowledge, were central to the sexual discourses of the Enlightenment.